Hospitality Development Update: Moving Towards LEED

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Courtyard Marriott in Portland, Ore.

Green construction starts have increased by 50% in the past two years, and now represent 25% of all new construction today, according to a study by McGraw Hill. Green and sustainable construction initially had a slow start for the hospitality industry, but now seem to be gaining momentum. Today, there are 141 LEED-certified hotels and nearly 1,200 more that are registered with the intent to certify upon completion.

Because there are wide misperceptions about the cost of building green, hotel owners have been hesitant to embrace green practices. However, it has been proven that green building does not have to cost more. In some cases, where projects target higher or more complex levels of green building, there may be added upfront costs of 1-4% - but these costs can be recouped relatively quickly, often within the first few years. Investing in high energy performance equipment and high insulated building materials has the shortest pay back from a cost standpoint, and generally, high-performance buildings and building green reduce operating costs and increase the net operating income for the life of the building.

Green hotels are catching on in a number of ways. For one, there is a new generation of hotel owners who put a higher asset value on their investments, and are realizing the benefits of green building practices. Many hotels are taking advantage of the federal, state and local incentives that can help pay for half to all of the additional cost to construct LEED-certified buildings: Attaining LEED certification, which is third-party verified, signifies a true green hotel. Marketing advantages, permit expediting, obtaining building approvals and reduced county fees are just a few other reasons why more owners are now turning towards building LEED. On the corporate sustainability front, major Fortune 500 corporations are changing their travel preferences to book green hotels, in order to boost their own company-wide green efforts.

Hotels have the greatest opportunity for savings since they are consuming resources seven days a week, 24 hours a day - unlike most other commercial properties. Water usage and energy consumption are the primary areas of focus for hoteliers, especially since the hospitality industry consists of unique building types that have more bathrooms than any other type of construction. Additionally, incorporating cost effective technologies and combining entire building systems is the next area of growth for the industry. Providing building automation systems in areas previously controlled manually by the guest or by the hotel staff can add to the bottom line.

Other areas of development in greening the hotel business include the supply chain of manufacturers. Each individual hotel is supplied by thousands of product industries, from furniture to textiles to the pens and paper provided for guests in each hotel room. With notoriously low profit margins in the hotel industry, there need to be more cost-neutral, green solutions. More focus is being put on interior finishes and indoor air quality while rating systems for suppliers are being created by independent organizations such as MindClick. Furthermore, a holistic approach needs to be incorporated in everyday practices like the food and beverage supply chains that are required to support large and small hotels, including restaurants and banquet facilities. Changing purchasing policies to source locally has economic benefits to the community and should always be investigated. Moving towards organic produce and beverages - including alcoholic beverages - is a way to make a difference.

LEED v4, will include the very first LEED rating system for hospitality, will be a great new start in these areas.. This new rating system will include LEED credits for interior finishes and even new LEED points for sustainable food and beverage programs.

Additionally, the LEED Volume Program streamlines the LEED certification process

for companies that are building or renovating a large number of properties – typically 25 or more – saving projects time and money. Through this program, Marriott will have more LEED-certified hotels for its select service hotels in a period of three years, compared to a period of 12 years from all of it brands combined using one-off LEED certification. Marriott International recently released two additional brands, rounding out our portfolio of five select service brands using the LEED Volume program: Courtyard, Fairfield Inn & Suites, Residence Inn, SpringHill Suites and TownPlace Suites. Together, these new prototypes will allow our owners to build more sustainable hotels and work toward transforming the hospitality industry. Marriott looks forward to constructing many more LEED-certified hotels in the upcoming years.

For more information on LEED and hospitality, visit usgbc.org/hospitality.

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